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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: WHAT A DIFFERENCE TWO YEARS MAKES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Northern Uganda, once dubbed "the world's worst forgotten humanitarian crisis" by U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator Jan Egeland, is now emerging from one of Africa's most brutal conflicts.

Today's northern Uganda is dramatically different than it was in ¶2006. The majority of internally-displaced persons have returned to or near their homes due to the improved security situation. Elected local governments have re-assumed responsibility for governance and service delivery, previously provided by non-governmental organizations. If anything, northern Uganda suffers from too much outside intervention. The GOU continues to bristle at international community efforts to categorize northern Uganda as a humanitarian crisis comparable to eastern DRC, Somalia, and Darfur/Eastern Chad.

¶2. (SBU) Summary continued: For the returnees, the first meeting of the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) Monitoring Committee, set for November 4, represents an important milestone in achieving broad ownership of northern reconstruction and frankly discussing implementation and resource issues. The Government of Uganda and donors have collectively committed \$615 million to reconstruction and development activities in northern Uganda over the past two years. Nonetheless, despite this remarkable progress, northern Uganda still lags behind the rest of the country in health, education, and security infrastructure. To meet this challenge, U.S. Government efforts should focus on ensuring that peace and security prevail and civilian law and order institutions are re-established, that local government service delivery capacity is strengthened, that returnees receive infrastructure support in return areas, and that food security and livelihoods are facilitated. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND: PEACE DIVIDENDS
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¶3. (U) The Government of Uganda's (GOU's) Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) Monitoring Committee (PMC) will hold its first meeting on November 4. The meeting will spotlight the GOU's reconstruction efforts in northern Uganda. The PMC is the policy-level body responsible for the progressive planning, coordination and monitoring of the PRDP, which was launched in 2007, over the next three years. The Prime Minister is the chair and it includes the Ministry of Finance and sector ministries, elected district leaders, development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector representatives. This first meeting marks an important step in achieving broad ownership of and consensus on the PRDP, and will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to frankly discuss implementation issues, particularly financial resource questions and points of contention between the central and local governments. Future meetings will initially be held quarterly to monitor progress as the PRDP is rolled out.

¶4. (U) Implementation of the PRDP would not have been possible without the dramatic improvement in the security situation on the ground in the north following 22 years of brutal insurgency led by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). There have been no LRA attacks in northern Uganda over the past two years, the result of

the Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF) having pushed the LRA into southern Sudan and the LRA's relocation to Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in July, 2006. Negotiations between the Government of Uganda (GOU) and the LRA helped to consolidate the improved security situation. The Juba Peace Process produced a Final Peace Agreement (FPA), which LRA leader Joseph Kony has yet to sign, and several subsidiary agreements on Comprehensive Solutions (of which the PRDP is part) and Accountability and Reconciliation, which the GOU has undertaken to implement unilaterally.

¶5. (U) Egeland's successor, John Holmes, recently acknowledged that the improved security situation has "enabled hundreds of thousands of Ugandans to enjoy the benefits of relative stability and to begin to return home after many years of displacement." Some internally-displaced persons (IDPs) maintain that they would feel more secure if Kony signed the FPA, but this has not hindered IDP returns, which are more closely tied to actual security conditions on the ground, the availability of land for farming, grass for thatching and the rhythm of the planting seasons.

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THESE GAINS MUST BE PRESERVED
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¶6. (U) Northern Uganda today is a very different place than it was in 2006, when the peace process began, and according to Holmes, "these gains must be preserved." In July 2006, when the negotiations between the GOU and LRA began, there were 1.8 million IDPs and some 24,000 children known as "night commuters" who sought refuge in shelters in towns to avoid abduction at night. The shelters closed in 2007 due to the improved security situation. In 2008, displaced persons in Teso and Lango Districts have returned home. As of August, 63% of the original 1.1 million IDPs in the Acholi districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader had left their "mother camps" and moved either to transit sites within commuting distances of their farms (36%) or to their villages of origin (27%).

The land is being cultivated, livestock numbers are increasing, children are walking back and forth to school, and lives are beginning to assume a new, post-conflict normalcy. Some studies note, however, that there will be a significant number of IDPs who were born in the camps who may not want be farmers and who will choose to stay in town centers.

¶7. (U) Politically, northern Ugandans have newly-elected representation in the national Parliament and leadership at the local government level to voice their needs and grievances, exercise governance and administration, and deliver services to the people. They decreasingly depend on non-governmental organizations for these functions. In February 2006, opposition parties and independents won a majority of positions in the north. Northern elected leaders take their governing responsibilities seriously and continue to engage the central government on a wide range of political, economic, and development issues in northern Uganda. While this assertion of governing authority has created friction between northern local leaders and some NGOs over the role of the NGOs in a changed political landscape in northern Uganda, the trend on balance is strongly positive.

¶8. (U) The primary peace dividend from the conclusion of the FPA has been a dramatic shift in northern public opinion, some of it shaped by elected northern leaders. As the peace talks began in July 2006, public perceptions of the GOU were overwhelmingly negative. Northerners blamed the GOU for forcing them into squalid camps, human rights abuses by the military, and political and economic marginalization. The LRA's lack of commitment to a peace deal became more and more evident as the negotiations dragged on, delayed by excessive demands from the LRA delegation. At the same time, Government negotiators, led by Minister of Internal Affairs Ruhakana Rugunda and Minister of State for International Affairs Henry Okello Oryem, worked hard to conclude an acceptable peace deal. These factors, combined with Kony's repeated refusals to show up for meetings to sign the FPA, have led northerners to conclude that Kony is the problem. The GOU, in turn, is held in increasingly high esteem. Nonetheless, the Government could fail to capitalize on shifting public opinion if it does not deliver on development promises.

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FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY
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¶9. (U) In light of this significant and enduring progress since 2006, Northern Uganda no longer deserves the distinction of being considered "the world's worst forgotten humanitarian crisis." It has transitioned from a war zone to a civilian-run reconstruction effort, with significant amounts of donor assistance and attention. If anything, northern Uganda suffers from too much outside intervention. The GOU continues to bristle at efforts to continue to categorize northern Uganda as a current humanitarian crisis given that the absence of state power nearby in eastern DRC, Somalia, and Darfur/Eastern Chad has left large populations unprotected in lawless and conflict-ridden areas. Uganda has sent its own peacekeepers and police to these regions to help stabilize these much more dire humanitarian situations.

¶10. (SBU) At the peak of the LRA conflict, there were 45,000 Ugandan soldiers in northern Uganda providing protection for the IDPs, escorting humanitarian convoys, performing civilian law enforcement functions, and conducting operations against the LRA. Today, the large military presence is no longer visible because the military has returned to the barracks and to its traditional role of securing the Ugandan border from incursion and preparing for operations against the LRA. Approximately, 40,000 Ugandan soldiers are deployed on or near the border and in southern Sudan while law enforcement responsibilities have been returned to the Ugandan Police Force. The Government has embarked on an aggressive campaign for recruitment and deployment of police to fully restore civilian-based law and order in the north. As a sign of the GOU's commitment to re-establishing civilian authority, the Deputy Inspector General of Police has been deployed full-time in northern Uganda.

¶11. (SBU) Progress on the ground and the LRA's unwillingness to engage in the peace process has led Joachim Chissano, the U.N. Special Envoy, not to seek a renewal of his mandate when it expires in November 2008. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Uganda is also supporting the transition from emergency relief to recovery and development by preparing a Consolidated Appeal for 2009 focused on the most vulnerable groups and individuals in the LRA-affected areas; food, basic services and protection for Karamoja; and residual support for remaining refugees in the West Nile region. Humanitarian efforts will work to ensure coherence with development programming and the shift from UN and NGO to GOU-led service provision.

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CHALLENGES AHEAD: AFTER MOUNTAINS, THERE ARE MOUNTAINS
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¶12. (U) Nonetheless, despite coming a long way, northern Uganda is facing several development challenges to bring it to the same level of development as the rest of the country. The most pressing of these are: (1) continuing to ensure that peace and security prevail, and that people have access to justice through enhanced civilian police and other justice, law and order institutions; (2) strengthening local governance and service delivery capacity, especially at the sub-county level, to replace NGO-provided services during the transition from relief to development; (3) developing and disseminating information on procedures for former IDPs to adopt one of the three "durable solutions" following displacement - return to the place of origin, local integration in the areas in which the IDPs initially took refuge, or settlement in another part of the country; and (4) enhanced food security and livelihoods.

¶13. (SBU) Kony's refusal to sign the FPA is not a show-stopper. To be sure, there is disappointment that Kony has failed to sign the agreement. The GOU, donors, and the U.S. Government still support diplomatic efforts to persuade Kony to sign the agreement, but donors have decided to no longer fund the infrastructure of a peace process and food for the LRA in the absence of interest and/or good faith on Kony's part. The USG, the GOU, and the Government of Southern Sudan have made it clear that the peace process cannot be open-ended. The GOU message to the people of northern Uganda is that it is safe for them to resettle voluntarily following displacement, return to their home areas, and resume normal lives.

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FUNDING RELIEF TO RECONSTRUCTION: DONOR ACTIVITY
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¶14. (U) USAID established an office in Gulu in June 2006 and has extended its presence for another three years in agreement with the GOU. The USG Gulu Branch office is the only such bilateral donor presence in the north. The office and its staff visibly demonstrate the U.S. Government's commitment to move from emergency relief to recovery and development activities in northern Uganda. For many years, the U.S. has been the largest contributor of humanitarian and now development assistance to northern Uganda. This fiscal year, the USG will provide \$163 million to open roads, deliver services to treat and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, rebuild the agriculture sector, increase access to clean water, improve the quality of education, build the capacity of local government, assist with the reintegration of former combatants, conduct health-related research and military training. The U.S. Mission in Uganda will continue to work with the GOU, local authorities, civil society groups, religious and traditional leaders, and ordinary citizens to secure a peaceful future for northern Uganda.

¶15. (U) Other donors and UN agencies have also been supporting the peace process, as well as humanitarian and development efforts. This financial year, donor support through the GOU budget amounts to some \$70 million for support to the Office of the Prime Minister's coordination of the PRDP, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAFF), the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Program (NUREP), support to the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), and other sector support for agriculture, education, health, water and environment, roads and other public works, and strengthening local governments. Off-budget support includes an additional \$200 million for humanitarian assistance and projects in all of the foregoing sectors.

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UGANDAN OWNERSHIP OF NORTHERN RECOVERY
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¶16. (U) The Ugandan Government has demonstrated its commitment to a peaceful settlement of the conflict by persistently participating in the Juba Peace Process since July 2006. It has also shown commitment to closing the gap in economic and social indicators between the north and the rest of the country by launching the PRDP in September 2007 after two years of extensive consultations with stakeholders in all 40 PRDP districts and all central government ministries. Implementation of the PRDP formally began on July 1, 2008 and although progress so far has been slow, the 2008/09 national budget provides \$182 million for the 14 programs and 40 districts covered by the PRDP, a 20% increase over the previous financial year. While the debate will continue through the PMC and other fora as to whether this financial commitment is sufficient, it is certainly a start that can be built upon in future years.

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OUR MESSAGE: KEEP IT UP, STEP IT UP, BUILD IT UP
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¶17. (SBU) U.S. efforts to mitigate the effects of the conflict in the north, bring about reconstruction and development, and facilitate reconciliation, dominate our peace and security and economic development agenda in Uganda. The U.S. Government remains committed to supporting the current positive trends on the ground in northern Uganda through an active, collaborative Mission team and an office in northern Uganda. This requires flexibility, constant analysis of ongoing events, and a willingness to take action to keep the momentum going in a positive direction. It is important to note that some statistical indicators will show initial backsliding as returnees go home to areas that lack the level of health and educational services provided in the camps. Nonetheless, we expect current positive trends to continue, which means northern Uganda will be a different place one year from now, one in which the U.S. can take pride because of our positive contributions to the peace process and improvement in the lives of the formerly displaced.

¶18. (SBU) Nonetheless, we continue to advance our interests and encourage the Ugandan Government to deliver on its promises to develop northern Uganda. Our message on northern Uganda includes:

-- Recognition of the Government's efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the 22-year conflict with the LRA. The GOU has demonstrated restraint and patience during the peace process and its commitment to protect the people of northern Uganda from the LRA. We encourage Uganda to continue talking to its neighbors, particularly Sudan and DRC, to deal with the regional aspects of the LRA problem and implications for returnees.

-- Reaffirming our commitment to partnership with the GOU on maintaining and strengthening security and implementing the PRDP.

-- Supporting efforts to re-establish democratic institutions, respect for human rights and rule of law, reconciliation and accountability, and strengthening the capacity of local governments to deliver services to returning populations.

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COMMENT
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¶19. (SBU) We have noted the positive trends in northern Uganda, which no longer requires as much outside intervention from the international community to sustain. Ugandans are taking ownership of recovery efforts in the north. IDPs are returning freely to their home areas, where they need to be supported, and have elected local and national leaders representing their interests. The U.S. and other diplomatic missions are working closely with the GOU on the implementation of the PRDP and accountability and reconciliation elements of the FPA. We do not view lack of political will or funds as the primary cause of slow PRDP implementation, but rather lack of capacity within the line ministries and districts to absorb and coordinate large inflows of funds for northern reconstruction, which is a technical issue. Politically, observers on the ground agree on Kony's lack of interest in the FPA, that the Juba Peace Process has played itself out, and that the focus of peace efforts needs to be in Uganda, not elsewhere.

HOOVER